

merely seek an agreeable pastime in frequenting musical performances of any kind, that the compositions of Rossini form a memorable epoch in the annals of the art, and perhaps an interesting feature in the history of the present age. Wherever his operas have appeared, they have soon rooted firmly and almost exclusively in the public favour, exerted an inconceivable influence on musical taste, and nearly banished from the stage—it might almost be said, from our recollection—

Italy, where the works of Rossini began to make an impression about eighteen years ago, they have succeeded in nearly supplanting the operas of Paisiello, Guglielmi, Meyer, Paer, and even Cimarosa. In Germany, national predilections have rendered their sway perhaps somewhat less universal and exclusive; but, at all events, even there Rossini is the lord of the ascendant. Winter—nay, the incomparable Mozart, are rather tolerated than adored, as heretofore; and even Haydn and Beethoven, although the field, which their genius had occupied, was not quite the same, have been much less cherished since the intrusion of the Gran Maestro. In France, musical appetite is generally to be stilled with smaller fare. In a country where "Le Devin du Village," "Annette et Lubin," and such light food, are still capable of bringing good houses, the works of Gretry, D'Alayrac, &c. run little risk; and the compositions of Mehul, Boieldieu, &c. may bid defiance to alien intrusion. But although France may have been less fickle towards its native favourites than other countries, it has by no means been exempt from the Rossiniomania. In some respects indeed, France has outdone all its neighbours. Not content with resting upon the productions of the "Swan of Pesaro," nothing would be but to be in possession of the bird itself, in order to have to ourselves all the golden eggs yet in expectancy. But this monopolizing speculation has not been very successful. Whether the bird, when thus secured, had done laying for good, or whether he has been overfed; or whether the climate disagree with his nature and habits, so much is certain, that the eggs produced since have not been exactly eggs; some, indeed, were found remarkably stale.

Of the prodigious march and spreading of the Rossinian music in this country the reader is sufficiently aware. Our worship approaches idolatry, and surpasses that of all other nations. Of the sixty subscription nights at the King's Theatre, between forty and fifty are generally devoted to operas of Rossini; and the majority of musical publications consists of adaptations from his operas, or of pieces more or less founded on his productions.

When a thing is so universally relished, the *prima facie* presumption is that it must possess some intrinsic value; and yet upon this point opinions are strangely at variance. While a large, and probably the greater portion of the musical public, worship Rossini as their idol, there are numbers who perceive in his music nothing but the emanations of a superficial mind, aided by a lively fancy and a great share of animal spirits; who not only deny him the merit of originality, but strongly accuse him of systematic plagiarism to an extent unprecedented in the works of any other master. In short, the whole history of music, probably, does not present us with the name of a composer upon whose merits opinions have been more divided, and whose works, at the same time, have made a greater or more universal sensation.

It therefore seems to be worth while, with a view to form a correct opinion on the subject, to consider, with some degree of care and accuracy, the peculiar and distinctive features of the Rossinian music, and to endeavour to trace the probable causes of its great popularity. In the next place, it appears to be an object of some interest, however difficult it may prove—to inquire into the effects which the works of Rossini have produced, not only with reference to dramatic and lyric composition (their immediate field of display), but also generally as regards the musical taste of the age, and the executive part of music, instrumental as well as vocal, but vocal in particular.

One of the most obvious and characteristic features in the compositions of Rossini, and perhaps that which has most contributed to their rapid and universal popularity, is no doubt the vivacity, the incessant and inexhaustible flow of animal spirits, which prevail in all his writings. In some of the latitudes north of the Alps, and in our own foggy, smoky, and gaseous atmosphere, we occasionally, it is true, meet with a race of beings who seem to delight in the lugubrious, and to feel supremely happy when moved to tears. Fortunately, however, the number of these lacrymants, even in these their foggy, smoky, and gaseous head-quarters, is not considerable; abroad they are fewer still, and in Italy this class of mortals is an absolute rarity. The exception, therefore, is trifling; and we may safely propound it as an axiom, that people in all countries like to be entertained by cheerfulness and gaiety, in music above all things; and that the composer who supplies this demand most readily and copiously, is sure to be most in favour, at least with the mass of the people.

In Rossini, therefore, the public found their *magnus Apollo*: his vivacity, his mercurial and light-hearted organization, was well calculated to administer light and palatable musical food to his gay and animated countrymen. Rossini's music breathes a life, a stirring, and a bustle, not to be met with in the works of any other composer. He seldom resorts to slow rhythms, if a more active measure will but tolerably serve the purpose; indeed, he frequently uses the latter when a more staid progress would have been infinitely preferable. "Keep moving," is his great motto. It is on that account that the musical figure called *triplets* has been taken by him into most especial favour. Their "rate of going" is peculiarly rash and animated, owing to the strong accent which the first of the three notes always carries, and which marks the rhythm with peculiar force and precision. Triplets will thus be found to occur abundantly in most of Rossini's pieces, even in slow movements, where they act as accelerators to the otherwise sluggish motion of longer notes. Instead of four sober crotchets, in a bar, we generally are treated with a dozen quaver triplets.

Our Maestro employs, unconsciously perhaps, a variety of other expedients to give rhythmical seasoning to his airs. To avoid an equal progress of equivalent sounds, one note is retarded by the and half-dots, at the expense of the following, which is barely allowed time to hop in with a momentary snap; thus again marking the rhythm more forcibly, as is the case more especially in military marches: a class of pieces essentially demanding rhythmical energy and precision, and in which, therefore, Rossini has been signally successful.

All these manifestations of a buoyant vivacity may be traced in nearly the whole of the compositions of Rossini, even in those intended for essentially serious situations, where, as has already been hinted, they at times occur out of their proper place. However pathetic, or even tragic, the poetry of an aria, &c. may be, the musical expression imparted to it by Rossini seems, with scarcely an exception, to be short of the intensity of emotion contemplated by the text. His musical metre, his rhythm, and his diction, are ever active, bustling, and animated. Without going to the length of maintaining that Rossini is absolutely lively and gay on occasions when the text speaks sadness and despair, it cannot, we think, be denied that none of his strains breathe the tender sensibility of Mozart, the deep feeling of Weber, or the heart-stirring pathos of Gluck. Hence it is that Rossini has been less successful in the serious and tragic drama, than in the comic and romantic; that his "Otello," "Zelmira," and "Semiramide," however masterly in some respects, must yield the palm to the "Barbiere" and "Tancredi." The two latter operas abound with a succession of original and fascinating melodies, apparently the spontaneous effusions of an exuberant musical fancy: while in the three serious dramas above adverted to, however we may recognize in them the presence of a master-mind, we meet with much fewer tokens of inventive originality and genial inspiration. This remark appears to us particularly

* Of "Guillaume Tell," the most recent French opera of Rossini, the writer of this paper has not yet had an opportunity of forming a judgment.

THE CHARACTERISTIC'S OF ROSSINI'S COMPOSITIONS.

It is admired by musicians and amateurs, as well as by those who

applicable to "Zelmira" and "Semiramide," the most recent Italian dramas set to music by Rossini. Very few of the melodies are of a dramatic character, or of a nature to fasten on the memory; some traits of compositional freak and whimsically perhaps excepted, which for a moment strike the ear with surprise without interesting its sympathy. As far as art goes, these two operas present scores considerably more elaborate and rich than the generality of the German school, the style of which Rossini has, intentionally perhaps, thought proper to imitate in several of the pieces.

If, as has been above observed, Rossini rarely reaches the tragic grandeur of Gluck, or the intense feeling of Mozart or Weber, it must be admitted, on the other hand, that he is as serious as he can contrive to be, his music is never lugubrious, whining, or even sentimental, as is the case with some clever compositions of the German school. This negative characteristic, in our opinion, is one of great merit, or, at least, greatly in his favour, (for it can hardly be called meritorious to abstain from that which is not in the man's organization.) The doleful in music ought very sparingly to be resorted to; most people are soon tired of it. Let a text be ever so melancholy, if music is to be set to it—and it had perhaps better be left alone.—The music may fitly fall much short of the gloomy import of the poetry. The long continuance of strains in the minor mode, the frequent employment of diminished sevenths, and of other expedients more peculiarly adapted to the expression of saddened feelings, soon create languor and ennui. It is probably owing to the predominance of serious and gloomy expression, that some compositions of undisputed merit have met with less success than might otherwise have been anticipated. Among these may be numbered Morlacchi's "Tebaldo e Isolina," and Marschner's "Vampyre."

While thus the total absence of every thing lachrymose in Rossini's works seems to compensate, in some degree, for the want of tragic grandeur and intense feeling, it is farther to be admitted, that in musically-depicting emotions of softness and tenderness, Rossini has often met with the happiest success; and to this point, perhaps, may be limited his capability of expressing the more serious sensations of the heart. The charming aria, "Ecco ridente il Cielo," in the "Barbiere," the sweet rural strains of "Anzora che sorgerai," and several other happy efforts of his pen, might be quoted in support of this opinion.

That the vivacious and animated nature of our bard would ensure him triumphant success in compositions of a lively cast, and in buffonery, must at once be self-evident. In this line he shines resplendent, and has often surpassed his most celebrated predecessors, Paisiello, Cimarosa, and even Mozart not excepted. Among many specimens which may be quoted in support of this assertion, it will be sufficient to remind the reader of one or two; the Largo al factotum, in the "Barbiere di Siviglia," is a perfect masterpiece of comic composition; it really stands unequalled. What a flow of animal spirits, what gaiety, what a buoyancy of life and bustle, both in the vocal part and in the orchestra! The same opera furnishes several other excellent compositions of the humorous kind, such as the first duet between Figaro and Almaviva; "Che invenzione," the bass song, "La Calanina," the two pieces which introduce Almaviva in the two successive disguises of a dragon and a music-master, &c. Again, in the "Turco in Italia," the duet between Don Geronimo and his flirt of a wife, "Per piacer alla Signora," is absolutely a cabinet picture of comic expression. These, and others which we could easily add to the catalogue, will readily silence all doubts as to the geniality and originality of Rossini's sprightly muse.

One observation by the way. When these and other comic effusions of the Italian school are contrasted with the coarse and vulgar trash which, in most of our English operas, is bawled out to the audience under the title of humorous songs, and generally received "with the most unbounded applause," who that is possessed of a grain of taste can refrain from shrinking with a humiliating blush from such a comparison? The manufacture of this rubbish is generally entrusted to humbler hands, distinct from the composer of the rest of the opera; and in the same manner is the drawing and roaring of it assigned to persons totally destitute of either voice or musical education. Such is our taste! such are, with very few exceptions, our comic songs!

In the foregoing remarks we have endeavoured to show what appeared to us to be one of the most obvious attractions in Rossini's music, viz. its sparkling vivacity, the unceasing buoyancy of animal spirits which pervades all his compositions. But there are other important peculiarities in his writings, equally obvious and universal, in our opinion, and no less advantageous.

The compositions of Rossini are essentially conspicuous for their rhythmical symmetry; as well as for extraordinary clearness of plan, uncommon perspicuity and intelligibility, great breadth both of melody and harmonic colouring, and, however the assertion may raise a smile, great simplicity!

Most of our readers, probably, are aware of the meaning of the term "rhythmical symmetry" in music; it is applied to a composition in which the successive phrases and periods stand in due correspondence with each other as regards duration, measure, and cadence; where all the parts present a well proportioned regularity and symmetry among themselves, so as to balance each other; like the feet and lines of a stanza of poetry, in which the same metrical symmetry forms, or at least ought to form, an essential requisite, although not always scrupulously observed by our modern bards of the "Free and Easy" school.

In this respect the dramatic compositions of the Italians are more or less favourably distinguished; but those of Rossini, above the rest, will, upon investigation, be found to present the most scrupulous symmetry of rhythmical plan and arrangement; if the term "scrupulous" may be applied to a feature which, instead of being the result of premeditated care and labour, is probably the mere spontaneous offspring of intuitive feeling and good taste. In the writings of Rossini, all is ever in the best proportion.

We are not aware of one single instance of lameness or other irregularity in his rhythm. This is a paramount feature of recommendation even with the multitude, who know nothing of its existence, but are unconsciously fascinated by its charms, even if the vehicle be but a drum, or a stick thumping on a dead board in regular cadence.

Connected, in some measure, with this merit is, that of clearness and perspicuity in the plan of a composition: and in this respect the works of Rossini are most perfect. The ear readily seizes the bearings between the successive periods, understands their import, weighs and compares them with each other—unconsciously in most cases; and buds with satisfaction the sequel, of which it had already formed a more or less defined anticipation. The mind is never at a loss to follow the composer's meaning; all is clear and intelligible, like a landscape in a serene summer's evening. The satisfaction imparted by such a score will more readily be appreciated by a comparison with one of a contrary description, which may be likened to a tract of country obscured by fogs or dark clouds. In music of the latter kind, the ear may occasionally be greeted by a transient passage of some promise—like a partial gleam of sunshine in the misty haze of confusion; but the anticipated enjoyment is soon marred by a heterogeneous sequel; we torment our imagination with efforts to feel at home, but find ourselves in a wilderness of crudities and incongruities.

Rossini's excellence, with respect to the important requisite of clearness and intelligibility of ideas, will scarcely be disputed. Not so, probably, the paradoxical praise we have ventured to award to him, as regards simplicity. How, it will no doubt be asked, can the music of Rossini be termed simple, fringed and garnished as it is at every bar with amplification, flourish, and ornament of every kind, and in all manner of ways? The praise of simplicity, it will be said, might as fitly be bestowed on the present attire of our belles, with all its trimming, fringing, and bounding, or on the florid style of Gothic

architecture, overloaded with scrolls, fretwork, and other ornamental minutiae.

We are quite ready to admit the decorative character of Rossini's music. No composer before him has been so lavish of adventitious, superfluous, and even injurious ornament, especially in his vocal parts; and we shall hereafter have to dwell more fully on this feature, when we enter upon the chapter of grievances. But it appears to us that a musical idea or phrase, although seasoned with embellishment, may, in its essence, in its primary conception, be perfectly simple; that this simplicity, however disguised by ornament, and perhaps even injuriously influenced by it, may subsist, and may be readily discerned, in spite of adventitious decoration. The latter may be compared to the tattooing of the skin of a Polynesian warrior, which, be it ever so profuse and whimsical, in no way hides the symmetrical beauty of his form. And since allusion has just been made to the ornamental characteristics of Gothic edifices, we would even hazard the paradoxical assertion, that some of these structures, in despite of the decorations in the minor details, present a striking and pleasing simplicity of outline and general composition. Their grandeur is not disputed, and it may be doubted whether grandeur can exist without simplicity.

It is thus that, in our opinion, the scores of Rossini, with all their numerous figures of superadded ornament, are simple in outline and primary conception. The skeleton of his ideas is plain and obvious, it is the mode of diction only which is florid; and when thus the frame work of a musical idea is of a simplicity readily to be seized by the ear, and—as is the case with Rossini—the mode of dressing out the idea is graceful and piquant, and frequently quite novel, it is not surprising that music of this description has so rapidly and universally found favour.

In the above enumeration of the various features of attraction which present themselves to the critical observer of Rossini's music our remarks may be considered as applying principally to melody. But most of these features equally pervade his harmony. The latter is equally, if not more, remarkable for perspicuity of design, an extraordinary degree of intelligibility, great breadth of colouring—if we may be allowed to borrow from the sister art a term so apt to our purpose—and also a striking degree of simplicity.

In the compositions of Rossini, these advantageous characteristics as regards harmony, cannot, perhaps, be considered as positive merits. A genius born, a true child of nature, apparently not imbued with the scholastic artifices of counterpoint, his harmonic colouring seems to be rather the spontaneous effusion of innate musical feeling than the result of studious elaboration. The sententious notices of his early career mention two instructors, Don Angelo Tesi and the Padre Stanislao Mattei, of whom Rossini is said to have received lessons in the theory of music and composition. But the period of tuition certainly does not seem to have been of long duration, and considering his vivacity and habitual indolence, we suspect a little contrapuntal schooling will have gone a great way with so mercurial a pupil; and this suspicion is by no means invalidated by his scores. They seldom exhibit any touches of contrapuntal artifice; or if there be an occasional gleam of the kind, it is very transient; the effect of momentary inspiration, soon abandoned. There is little of scientific interlacement between the parts. One melodic part, like the outline in a picture, almost always maintains its supremacy; and all the others, from the trombone to the piccolo, merely act in support of the main idea, so as to impart to it the requisite harmonic colouring. This colouring also may be termed simple, broad, and perspicuous in the extreme; simple as to the main object, yet by no means plain or naked. The instrumentation, we mean to assert, is never complex or confused; while maintaining its unity of aim and purpose, it at the same time is full and complete, very often luxuriantly rich, and as frequently replete with the most varied touches of elegance in manner and ornamental diction. In the instrumentation, as in the melody, however decorative and noisy the former may be devised, unity of impression is never lost sight of. All is perfectly luminous to every soul in the theatre, (in Italy at all events!) The box-keeper, the scene-shifter, and 'prim bawker of the libretto, all understand the language of the Maestro's meaning, probably, quite as well as the bald or bewigged theorist in the front of the pit, who, with a supercilious grin perhaps, laments the palpable decline of musical taste. There surely must be something in music which every body understands and is delighted with, whatever be its scientific elaboration! What do ninety-nine in a hundred—nay, perhaps nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand frequenters of even the King's Theatre care for high-wrought artifice in the parts—what for learned and abstruse modulations, what for fugues and canons?

Not that the compositions of Rossini are at all deficient as regards modulation. On the contrary, he occasionally launches freely into the regions of harmonic transition, and even ventures upon the boldest leaps. But he never modulates needlessly, for the mere sake of modulation—an expedient most freely resorted to by those writers who labour most under a poverty of melodic ideas. When Rossini modulates, he has an object in view, generally scenic; or he modulates sometimes, as in his overtures, with a view to heighten the harmonic colouring, or to produce variety or striking force of effect. On these occasions, however, he never entangles himself in a labyrinth of unmeaning transitions; he sees his way before him, and is not long in resuming it. The hearer, instead of being wearied by accompanying him in temporary deviations, finds himself refreshed for the remainder of the journey.

As to fugues and canons, to which we have just now alluded incidentally, we doubt whether Rossini can be said to have ever made either of these. "What! no canons?" some of our readers will exclaim, and bring in array against us "O Nume benefico!" "Di tanti regi!" "Mi manca la voce," &c. pointing to the very titles with which these pieces are inscribed. Any scientific discussion on this subject would be foreign to the object of our paper; but as we do not hesitate to maintain that these pieces are improperly styled canons, we feel compelled to state our reasons in a few words. Canons—if the reader will have patience with a line or two of dry definition—are vocal pieces of several parts, in which each part, falling in successively, executes the same melody, which is throughout adhered to by all the parts; these being so contrived as to act reciprocally in the way of accompaniment, as soon as two and more parts successfully come into co-operation. In the Rossinian canons, each part, it is true, enters successively, and commences with the same melody; but as soon as it thus steps in, the other parts no longer pursue the primary melody, but merely discharge the ordinary functions of accompaniment, so that the primary melody is never heard but in one of the parts. The Rossinian canons, therefore, are nothing more than tertzetti, or quartetts, in which each part successively begins with the same motive. We are aware that, in scenic music, some liberties are taken with compositions of this class; but these liberties do not amount to a total departure from the essence of the canon.

For the rest, we are far from finding fault with these pseudo-canons of Rossini. Several of them are highly dramatic and impressive; much more so, we are sure, than any real canon which could have been substituted in their place. All we meant to assert was, that so far as our acquaintance with his works extends, no proper canon or fugue occurs in them. This structure requires a degree of study and application, which, if we know enough of the disposition of Rossini, he probably feels seldom inclined to exert, even supposing him to be an adept in the mystery. Nay, if he were to urge in his defence that, in dramatic music at least, the trouble is not compensated by the effect, we should be disposed to concur. Canons and fugues, however fine and clever, are, after all, a scientific sort of Dutch melody, which, from the condition of its structure, must be deficient in musical sentiment and unity of expression.

"Gazza Ladra."

"Semiramide."

"Stor in Egito."